

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Byrsa I. Mission archéologique française à Carthage.  
Rapports préliminaires des fouilles 1974-1976,  
sous la direction de Serge Lancel.*  
(Collection de l'École française de Rome, 41) Rome, 1979.

*Byrsa II. Mission archéologique française à Carthage.  
Rapports préliminaires sur les fouilles 1977-1978: niveaux  
et vestiges puniques,  
sous la direction de Serge Lancel.*  
(Collection de l'École française de Rome, 41) Rome, 1981.

*Introduction à la connaissance de Carthage:  
la colline de Byrsa à l'époque punique.*  
Paris: Édition Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1983.

# CARTHAGE

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## A HISTORY

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Oxford UK & Cambridge USA



## THE 'FIRST PUNIC WAR' AND THE LOSS OF SICILY

*Angebant ingentis spiritus virum Sicilia Sardiniaque amissae*: not so long ago all budding humanists were familiar with this sentence of Livy's at the beginning of his account of the second Punic War (XXI, 1). The immensely proud man tormented by the loss of Sicily and Sardinia was Hamilcar Barca, father of Hannibal. He had all the more reason for being prey to such torment because, between 246 and 242, he had come within an ace of causing the Romans to lose their hold in Sicily. Thirty years later, his son would carry on to Italian soil the war of revenge in the spirit of which he had been brought up.

The loss of Sicily was the last unhappy act in a battle perpetually waged by Carthage to hold on at least to the invaluable strategic positions in the western part of the island (figure 229). I mentioned earlier the major phases of those ancient confrontations between Greeks and Carthaginians (above, pp. 88–91). At the very end of the fourth century, a treaty concluded in 306 between Rome and Carthage had fixed their positions, or more exactly fixed the respective limits on their intervention, by excluding Rome from Sicily and Carthage from Italy. It was a third-century Sicilian, Philinos, who passed on to us the clauses of that agreement, on which there is no reason to cast any doubt, in spite of those expressed about it by Polybius (III, 26, 3). The Greek historian, who was part of Scipio Aemilianus' circle in the middle of the following century, probably allowed himself to be persuaded by the Roman aristocrats of the futility of that treaty, rather than having to admit that Rome flouted it several decades later.

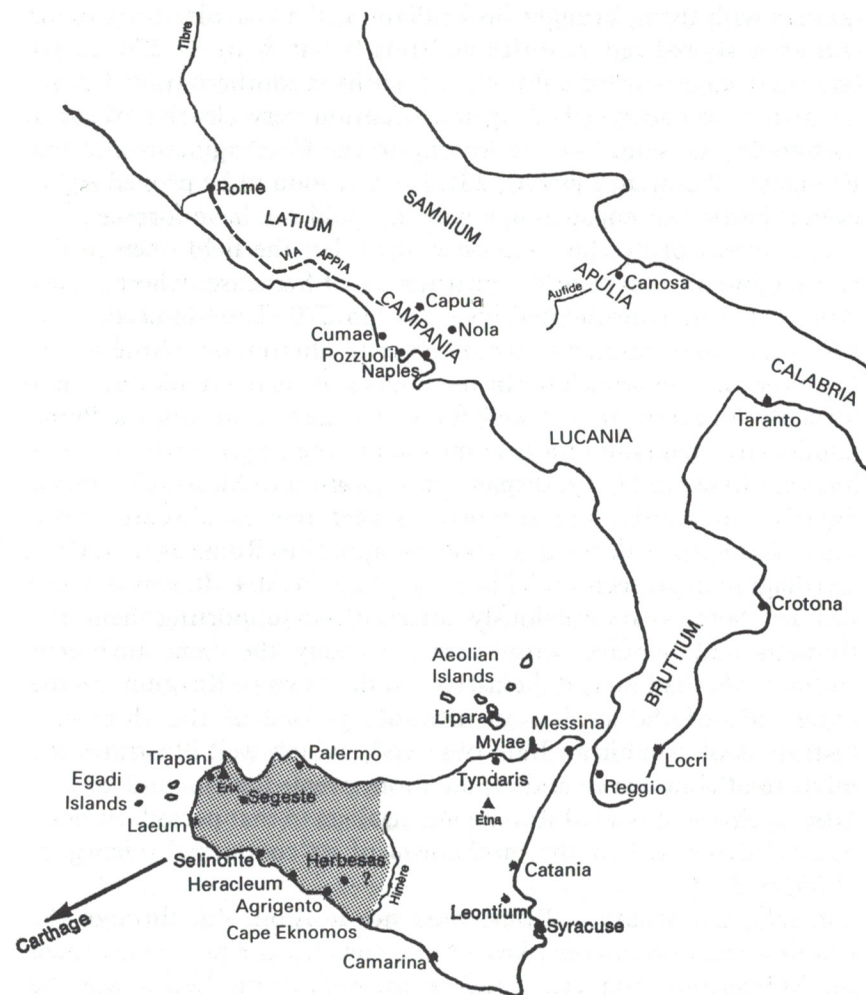


FIGURE 229 Southern Italy and Sicily, with the area of Punic influence in the middle of the third century BC stippled.

For in fact Rome did not respect the treaty. It so happened that bands of Campanian mercenaries – they had taken the name Mamertines, ‘men of Mars’, from the Oscan name, Mamers, the god of war – who, having come from the Bruttium across the straits, had for a long time been roaming Sicily, entering the service first of one side and then another, had seized Messina by force and had set up a kind of State there, in 288 BC. They lived peacefully for several years, while Pyrrhus, who had not sought to pick any



quarrel with them, brought his brilliant Sicilian cavalry feats to an end after short-lived victories and finally left Sicily in 276, to go back and wage war for a few more months in southern Italy. On his departure he had weighed up the situation very clearly: 'What a battlefield,' he said, 'we are leaving to the Carthaginians and the Romans!' (Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*, 23). He was soon to be proved right, even if battle was engaged in a way he could not have foreseen.

The retreat of Pyrrhus had once again left the field open to the Carthaginians, except in the principality of Syracuse, where a new 'king', Hieron, consolidated his power in 270. The Mamertines of Messina swiftly entered into conflict with Hieron, on whose territory they were encroaching in the course of their plundering. In a difficult situation, they asked for Carthage's protection: a Punic admiral in command of a fleet moored in the neighbourhood (perhaps stationed at Lipari) dispatched a garrison to Messina's citadel. Shortly afterwards, and for reasons that remain obscure, those same Mamertines decided to make an appeal to Rome against their Carthaginian protectors. This took place in 264. It was a risky venture. Some years previously, after at first supporting them, the Romans had handled with scant ceremony the same turbulent ruffians who had helped themselves to the town of Rhegium on the other side of the straits, an attitude, as one of the shrewdest historians of republican Italy observed, 'which well illustrates the mixture of connivance and repudiation, premeditation and *laissez-faire* so characteristic of Roman imperialism in that period, endlessly carried onward by the mechanism of its conquests' (Heurgon, 1969, p. 338).

In fact, the Senate in Rome took no decision. But through the *Comitia centuriata*, convoked by the consuls, the people accepted the Mamertines' request, which in the eyes of the Latins was the equivalent of a *deditio*, a submission. For Carthage, the despatch of a Roman expeditionary corps to Sicily was a *casus belli*. Disembarking with a detachment not far from Messina, the consul Appius Claudius Caudex was *de facto* declaring war.

#### THE CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT AND ITS FIRST PHASES

Many questions have been raised, and will continue to be, about the real causes of the conflict. Polybius (I, 11) emphasizes that, faced with the waverings of the Roman Senate, the consuls could count on the feelings of the people, who had been 'put to the test by the

preceding wars', and whose hope of booty decided them in favour of war. We shall see later what was actually the outcome of the ruinous battles that lasted more than twenty years. At another level, there is no doubt that the setting up of a Punic garrison in Messina, only a few miles from Italian shores, jeopardized that 'Monroe doctrine' which the treaty of 306 had put in concrete form. It has recently been stressed that, in the years immediately preceding the Romano-Punic war in Sicily, families of Campanian origin had become predominant in Rome and they were more alive to the danger represented by this proximity, aggravated as it was by that of the Punic naval bases in the Aeolian islands (Heurgon, 1969, p. 344). In fact the Atilii, who were Campanian, held the consulate seven times between 267 and 245. This first Punic War would be their war, as the wars against the Etruscans had been the business of the Fabii. Going even further, emphasis has been laid on the growing economic importance of Campania in those years, with its agricultural wealth asserting itself, its wines increasingly exported and its pottery output recently eclipsing that of Apulia and Tarentum (G. C. and C. Picard, 1970, pp. 183-4). The war in Sicily would thus appear to have been decided upon under the influence of a veritable commercial lobby, in order to defend its interests. Let us note that all these motives were pushing in the same direction, and that the annexation of Sicily, in the middle of the third century, could not be other than the best objective – certainly the most obvious, for us – of Rome's new Mediterranean policy, which was still feeling its way. We may recall the bragging of Petronius' Trimalchio, the great landowner, three centuries later in the Tarentum region, who said he wanted to add Sicily to his property so as not to have to leave home when the fancy took him to visit Africa (Petronius, 48, 3). The joke is significant: Trimalchio the parvenu landowner is daydreaming as the big Campanian landowners must have done, their aspirations merging with those of the Roman republic. 'Always more' is the motto of any imperialism.

I will not go into great detail here about a history of events rich in ups and downs and reverses of fortune on both sides, and recounted many times since the works of the German historian J. Beloch and the French Stéphane Gsell (G. C. and C. Picard, 1970, pp. 186-99; Brisson, 1973, pp. 27-98; Decret, 1977, pp. 154-69; Nicolet, 1978, pp. 606-12; Huss, 1985, pp. 222-49). I will merely keep to the main events and the principal developments. Hieron of Syracuse, theoretically allied to the Carthaginians, saw which way the wind was blowing and hastily gave his allegiance to the Romans



(263), guaranteeing to provide them with supplies throughout the duration of the war. The first important engagement took place shortly afterwards at Agrigentum, where the Carthaginians had concentrated contingents of mercenaries recruited in Spain, Gaul and Liguria, under the command of a general named Hannibal (262). At the end of a seven-month siege waged by an army under the command of two Roman consuls, the town was forced to surrender, but the Carthaginian general managed to escape with the greater part of his troops.

This setback, which caused many Sicilian towns, including Segesta, to rally to Rome, convinced the Carthaginians that they would not win against the legions in a pitched battle. They consequently modified their tactics, with troops contained in several well-fortified places, where the skill in siege-craft (in this instance the defence of strongholds) that they had learned from the Greeks – only recently had Pyrrhus proved himself to be the undisputed master of this military art – allowed them to keep the Romans in check. At the same time, light troops harassed the enemy supply convoys, and the mastery of the seas that the Carthaginians still enjoyed gave their swift vessels full scope to ravage the Italian coasts and land soldiers in the towns of the Sicilian littoral. For several years these tactics succeeded, all the better because, over terrain that they had known for a long time, the Carthaginians benefited from the continuity of command of experienced generals against consuls who were replaced each year.

This phase of the war marked a turning-point in Rome's military history. Conscious that it would stand no chance of gaining the upper hand without equipping itself with a navy, around 260 the Senate undertook to construct a fleet of 100 quinqueremes and 20 triremes. This occasion will bring to mind the fine story recounted by Polybius (I, 20), according to whom the Romans copied a Carthaginian ship that a manoeuvring error had let fall into their hands. In fact they called on the services of southern Italy's ship-building yards, in particular Tarentum, and it may be suspected that Greeks provided the pilots for this improvised fleet. After an unlucky initial attempt, it fell to the lot of a consul named Duilius to give Rome its first victory at sea after a combat in which the famous 'crow' worked wonders (above, p. 133). Thanks to this device, which allowed the enemy boat to be harpooned and held fast alongside, the Romans were able to avoid the tactic of ramming, favoured by Carthaginian sailors, and enforce that of boarding, where their naval troops could regain the conditions of battle that were

familiar to them. Thus at Mylae (Milazzo), between the Aeolian Isles and the north coast of Sicily, the Carthaginians lost fifty vessels and their admiral, the same Hannibal who shortly before had escaped from the siege of Agrigentum, was crucified by his own soldiers in Sardinia.

#### REGULUS' EXPEDITION IN AFRICA

Meanwhile, as the struggle dragged on and became bogged down in Sicily, Rome resolved to strike at Carthage in Africa itself, as had Agathocles half a century before. This expedition was entrusted to the two consuls of the year 256, L. Manlius Vulso and M. Atilius Regulus. According to Polybius (I, 25), a Carthaginian fleet tried unsuccessfully to intercept the armada of 330 vessels that had set off from Sicily. Landing was made on the south-east point of Cap Bon at Clypaea (Kelibia), and the consuls installed themselves and their troops in this strategic spot, which would assure their communications with Sicily and which, as we have seen, had been fortified by the Carthaginians in earlier days (above, p. 265). Those fortifications were unable to hold out for long, and the Roman troops ravaged the rich country areas that had with great difficulty recovered from the passage of Agathocles. It was very probably at this time that the little city of Kerkouane, between Kelibia and Ras ed-Drek, was captured and destroyed (above, p. 268). Shortly afterwards, on the orders of the Senate, Manlius Vulso brought the larger part of the fleet back to Italy, while Regulus remained where he was with forty ships, 15,000 foot-soldiers and 500 horsemen.

In the spring of 255 Regulus relaunched the campaign and won an initial success at Adyn, probably Uthina (Oudna), not far from Tunis (Fantar, 1989, pp. 82–3). Still following in Agathocles' footsteps, the Roman consul seized Tunis and set up his camp there (cf. figure 230). The peace negotiations that the Carthaginians, their backs to the wall, then conducted with him through the intermediary of a delegation came to an abrupt end, because of the excessive demands of Regulus, who sought to impose nothing less on his foe than the handing over of Sicily and Sardinia, not to mention many other one-sided conditions, notably the buying back of prisoners and payment of an annual tribute. Thereupon the Carthaginians' courage revived, with the arrival, amid a troop of mercenaries raised in Greece, of a Lacedaemonian officer named Xanthippus, who was engaged as a technical adviser. Xanthippus



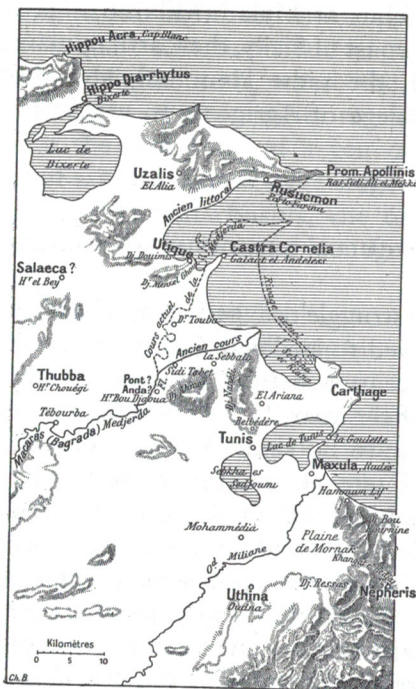


FIGURE 230 Principal theatres of operations in the mercenaries' war (after S. Gsell).

highlighted the errors committed by the Punic commanders during the last encounter: the legion must not be confronted on uneven terrain where its flexibility gave it the advantage over the Carthaginian phalanx, which was heavier and less manoeuvrable. On level ground, moreover, the cavalry and the elephants – those panzers of Antiquity – could play their part to the full.

So the Carthaginian army went off to camp not far from Tunis, and Regulus made the mistake of agreeing to fight on the terrain chosen by the enemy, where Xanthippus drew up the Punic battle line: the elephants covering the front in a single line, the phalanx behind, part of the mercenaries on the right wing, the more mobile among them as well as the horsemen in front of both wings (Polybius, I, 33). Regulus thought he would be able to withstand the impact of the elephants by ranging his maniples in deep order, giving a narrower front. This indeed was what happened, but his cavalry, fewer in number, turned tail, leaving his flanks unprotected. His left wing alone, which had eluded the elephants, pen-

etrated the Punic right wing and gained some ground, avoided disaster and was able to rejoin its base at Clypea. But Regulus was taken prisoner, together with several hundred of his men.

Here a myth must be disposed of, painful though it may be to do so, for it is a part of our culture. Polybius does not breathe a word about Regulus after his capture on the battlefield, and it is likely that he died in obscurity in some Carthaginian gaol. But a number of later Latin writers (and not merely the minor ones, but Cicero, Livy, Florus, Valerius Maximus and Aulus Gellius) substantiated the lovely story we know: after years of captivity, the Carthaginians in 251–250 sent the former consul to Rome, his mission being to obtain the exchange of captives and, if possible, the cessation of hostilities. Regulus vowed an oath to return to Carthage if the negotiations failed, and they did fail because he advised the Senate to continue the war. Faithful to his vow, he went back to Africa, to die a terrible death by torture. In his treatise on *Duties*, Cicero did not fail to highlight this unparalleled *exemplum*, using all the resources of his eloquence, if not of his inmost conviction. What could be finer, on the plane of personal ethics, than the sacrifice of this man of duty? What better illustration could there be of the *fides Romana*, compared with the *fides Punica*, for which read Punic perfidy? In our collective consciousness, and in the *Petit Larousse* which, in France, is one of its guardians, the statue of Regulus, the hero of untouched honour, has remained intact.

The Romans had to wait more than half a century before setting foot in Africa again after this serious setback, which was further aggravated the next year, 254, by a veritable naval disaster. They had been able to build up a war fleet quite rapidly; but they still had to acquire experience of the sea and mastery of the maritime routes. While a fleet of 350 ships, according to Polybius (I, 36, 10), sent by Rome to repatriate the remainder of Regulus' expeditionary force, had swept aside a Punic naval force of 200 vessels which had come to encounter them, that brilliant success was cancelled out on the homeward journey by an error on the part of the two Roman consuls who, against the advice of their pilots, wanted to go along the southern coasts of Sicily and their dangerous waters. When they were off Camarina, a storm sent nearly all their ships to the bottom; only eighty escaped shipwreck. Again the following year, 253, the consuls C. Servilius Caepio and C. Sempronius Blaesus, very poor admirals, were no luckier. With a new, hastily prepared fleet, they sailed along the eastern shores of Tunisia and, having reached the island of Djerba (Meninx), let themselves be caught by the tide and



ran aground in the shallows of the Syrtis Minor; they managed to get off only by jettisoning the whole of their ships' cargo. Returning to Palermo, they wanted to reach Italy by the most direct sea route: when they were right out to sea, a storm caused the loss of over 150 vessels. Following this new catastrophe, Rome gave up such distant maritime operations. The Carthaginians saw the removal of the danger that had threatened them so heavily on African soil and took new hope (Polybius, I, 39). It was during these years, in 247 precisely, that they widened their African lands by seizing distant Thevesta (present-day Tebessa, in Algeria), to the south-west of Carthage.

#### THE NAVAL BATTLE OF THE AEGATES AND THE END OF THE SICILIAN WAR

In Sicily itself, the war continued with varying fortunes on both sides. There were setbacks at first for the Carthaginians. After the capture of their largest urban possession, Palermo, in 254, they found themselves reduced to their fortresses in the far west of Sicily, Lilybaeum (Marsala), where they had entrenched themselves after the destruction of Motya in 397, and *Drepanum* (Trapani), which was their naval base. The Romans spared no effort to gain possession of that base, and during the siege they put into operation procedures that, with hindsight, seem to be a rehearsal for what would succeed a century later in Carthage. The entry to the port was blocked by ships that were sunk there and then by a sort of improvised dike, which the sea's action, however, broke down, freeing the access. And the 20,000 soldiers that Rome had mobilized to besiege the town were unable to wear down the resistance of the 10,000 defenders under the orders of Himilco, the governor of the place. In 249 the consul Appius Claudius Pulcher believed he could make an end of it by catching the Carthaginian fleet by surprise in the harbour, with the aid of 120 vessels; that attempt ended in a serious setback and the loss, on the Roman side, of 93 ships (Polybius, I, 51). Several other daring feats of assistance by the Punic admirals along the Sicilian coasts discouraged their foe for a while from confronting them at sea.

A little later, to relieve Himilco, the valiant defender of Lilybaeum, Carthage dispatched to Sicily a young general destined for a great future, Hamilcar Barca. The latter, from his Sicilian *finistère*, stepped up maritime raids on the Italian coasts between 247

and 241. The better to defend the strongholds of Lilybaeum and Drepanum, he installed himself on the acropolis of Mount Eryx (Erice), not far from the temple formerly consecrated to Astarte (the Erycine Venus of the Latins), an eagle's eyrie from which he harassed the enemy, stationing his troops not far from his own camp, in the direction of Palermo.

This war lasted more than twenty years, during which Rome in particular had sunk enormous sums of money beneath the sea in the form of hundreds of lost ships: 700, according to Polybius, against 400 for the Carthaginians. As the war effort could no longer be subsidized from public funds, the Senate resorted to the private means of those who had most to gain from victory and thus the conquest of Sicily. Men of the ruling class, says Polybius (I, 59), that is, those Campanian aristocrats we have already seen at the origins of the conflict, either individually or grouped in consortia, provided at their own expense fully-equipped vessels, on the sole condition of being reimbursed for the amounts expended should victory result. That is how a fleet of 200 ships, under the command of the consul C. Lutatius Catulus, came to cut off Drepanum and Lilybaeum from all communication by sea. For its part, Carthage had sent a squadron bringing reinforcements and supplies to Hamilcar. The decisive naval encounter took place in the spring of 241 in the vicinity of the Goat Islands (Aegates), offshore from the hideout held by the Carthaginians. They were defeated. Hamilcar Barca, who henceforth lost all hope of obtaining assistance by sea, received full powers from Carthage to engage in negotiations with the Roman consul. From him he obtained the honours of war for his soldiers and those of Gisco, the governor of Lilybaeum, in return for the payment of a modest ransom. For Carthage, which now occupied only the tiniest plot of Sicilian soil, the final peace treaty might seem advantageous: it abandoned all claim to Sicily and the Aeolian Isles. The financial clauses, light at first in the initial draft of the agreement between the consul and Carthaginian negotiators, were made more severe by the demands of the Roman people, says Polybius (I, 63, 1). Carthage had to pay immediately 1000 Euboean talents and 2200 more in ten yearly payments. If it is difficult for us to evaluate with any precision how much that sum represented, at all events it is clear that it fell far short of the total cost of the war for the Romans.

Carthage lost much more from the affair than a little corner of Sicily. It was the first stitch giving way in a fabric that was starting to unravel. The two large islands to the north, Sardinia and Corsica,



now became vulnerable. Their defection would be the consequence – even if not immediately – of the financial difficulties that assailed the Punic state.

#### THE MERCENARIES' WAR

After the conclusion of the Peace of Lutatius, 20,000 men of the Punic armies remained in western Sicily, the vast majority of whom were mercenaries – the others were Libyans, Carthage's subjects – whom the clauses of the treaty banned from being demobilized on the spot. The task of repatriating them to Africa fell to Gisco, the governor of Lilybaeum. He did so very astutely, sending them in small groups, staggering the departures, to leave Carthage's government time to pay them off as they arrived and then to send the dismissed mercenaries back to their country of origin. But the Carthaginian Senate reacted like shopkeepers: they allowed the mercenaries back from Sicily to assemble in the city, hoping that by means of an overall negotiation they would be able to persuade them to agree to relinquish part of their pay (Polybius, I, II, 66). Then, as they were becoming a nuisance in Carthage itself, it was decided to regroup them in Sicca (Le Kef). There the military governor of Carthage's African territory, the same Hanno who several years earlier had enlarged its Libyan marches by seizing Theveste (Tebessa), concluded an address in which he stressed the desperate financial straits of the Republic, with the proposal to pay them off at a lower rate than the one previously agreed. The camp at Sicca contained a mix of Iberians, Gauls, Ligurians, Balearics, Greeks and Africans: speakers of many different languages, because of which, with the assistance of certain malicious officers, Hanno's speech became incomprehensible or unacceptable. All the more so since these men had nothing but mistrust for a leader under whom they had not served. The mercenaries rebelled and came in crowds to camp near Tunis. There, seeing that the threat they represented was alarming the Punic government, they raised the stakes: having obtained satisfaction as regards their dues, they then demanded reimbursement for their kit, their horses . . . The Senate in Carthage appointed Gisco as arbitrator.

The famous pages of Flaubert's novel, which are historically exact in broad outline since step by step they follow our sole source, Polybius, popularized the heroes of this rebellion. Like Polybius, Flaubert made a star of one of those 'half-Greeks', as the historian

called them, often former slaves of Hellenic culture who had escaped from the gaols of Sicily or southern Italy: Spendios, a Campanian who had turned renegade against the Romans and had everything to lose from a negotiated solution of this crisis with the Carthaginians. Besides his physical strength and courage, stressed by Polybius, he had something that the barbarians surrounding him often lacked: tactical intelligence and the gift of the gab. He had little difficulty in persuading the leader of the Libyans, Matho, to make common cause with him. During the preceding episodes Matho had shown himself to be an active agitator and, as an African, he lacked the resources to be able to flee far from Carthage's resentment. It was easy for him to make his compatriots believe that Carthage would take revenge on them, once the rest had gone back to their own countries. Through fear, the two men managed to eliminate all opposition in the mercenaries' camp and make them present a united front to Gisco. The latter, who had begun by settling with the mercenaries from foreign lands, told the Libyans demanding their due from him to address themselves to their general, Matho. This reply unleashed their fury; they hurled themselves on Carthage's coffers to loot them and, with Matho and Spendios stoking their anger to make them commit the irreparable act, they seized Gisco and his followers and put them in chains.

It was the start of an 'inexorable war' (Polybius, I, 65, 6), that is to say, implacable, savage. The atrocious nature of the mercenaries' war, also called the 'African war' by Polybius, as opposed to the one waged chiefly in Sicily, has most to do with its aspects of civil war (the Libyans of the African territory were subjects of Carthage) and almost of revolution. The most recent historians (G. C. and C. Picard, 1970, pp. 199–203; Brisson, 1973, pp. 109–20; Decret, 1977, pp. 171–3; Huss, 1985, pp. 252–9) have laid emphasis on these aspects, which are not fully brought out in the Greek historian's account.

Matho and his allies hastened to send emissaries to the principal towns in Africa, urging them to seize the chance of liberty as regards Carthage and asking for their assistance. Those appeals received a broad response: nearly all the African populations, says Polybius (I, 70, 9), sided with the rebels and provided them with supplies and reinforcements. The majority of Libyans from the territories controlled by Carthage made common cause with the mercenaries; the women surrendered their jewellery. Matho and Spendios were thus able to amass large enough sums to give the mercenaries their back-pay and finance the uprising. Such solidarity



is easy to explain: Carthage had put pressure on the Africans during the long war in Sicily, demanding for its armies half the crops and the payment of double tributes. Very soon, according to Polybius (I, 73, 3), 70,000 Libyans joined the mercenaries. These forces were divided into three groups. Two armies set off to besiege Utica on one hand and Bizerta (Hippo Dhiarrytus), which had remained loyal to Carthage, on the other. Another army corps, stationed near Tunis, cut off the isthmus and isolated the Punic capital from the mainland (figure 230). To free Utica the Council of the Elders appealed to Hanno, the conqueror of Theveste, who in fact at first scattered the besiegers, but spoiled that success by his negligence and spinelessness. Flaubert amused himself in his novel by portraying a caricature of an obese 'suffete' warming his ulcers in boiling hot steam-rooms, piggishly gorging himself with exotic or exquisite delicacies.

Here we see the reappearance of Hamilcar Barca, whom Polybius, echoing the Roman viewpoint in his assessment of the war in Sicily, considered to be the best war leader of the time (I, 64). Carthage entrusted him with command of the war against the insurgents, with newly recruited mercenaries, a few renegades from the enemy camp, and infantry and cavalry forces raised among the citizens, about 10,000 men in total. A bold manoeuvre – a surprise march along the sandy strip going from Gammarth to Ras el-Mekki, which at that time was in the process of closing the Gulf of Utica – enabled him to lift the siege of Utica and massacre several thousand mercenaries. Then the alliance he obtained with Naravas and his Numidian horsemen helped him to win a fresh victory. At the same time Hamilcar exercised a little cajolery: from among the prisoners he took into his forces those who rallied to him and let the others go, contenting himself with their promise not to fight Carthage in the future.

Then came the episode to which above all this war owes its title of inexpiable. The chief leaders of the rebels, Matho and Spendios to the fore, quickly weighed up the danger of divisions within their side that Hamilcar's clever tactic was provoking. To prevent it, a brutal response that would compromise everyone and leave no hope of turning back was proposed in assembly by a Gaulish chief, Autharitus, whose knowledge of the Punic language, of which many had rudiments, allowed him to make himself understood by almost all the mercenaries. Gisco, the former governor of Lilybaeum, who had conducted the first negotiations with them at Sicca, was still in their hands. Together with several hundred of his companions who had been held prisoner, he was put to death by the

most atrocious tortures. Feelings ran high in Carthage, where the generals Hamilcar and Hanno were urged to unite their efforts to put an end to matters with the mercenaries. But their disagreement was the origin of an innovation in the appointment of the military leaders that might be termed 'democratic': the Council of the Elders agreed to relinquish their responsibility for choice in favour of the army itself. The army chose Hamilcar.

The year was 238. The war with the mercenaries had been going on for three years. Now events speeded up. Hamilcar managed to lure the greater part of the rebels, nearly 40,000 men, into a cirque or gorge which, says Polybius (I. 85, 7), 'was known as the Saw, because of its resemblance to that tool'. It has not been possible to identify this place exactly, called by Flaubert 'the gorge of the Axe'; it might be in the vicinity of Zaghuan or of Djebel Ressay (figure 230). There the mercenaries, already exhausted by famine, were massacred by Hamilcar's elephants. Spendios and the other chiefs were taken prisoner and crucified before the walls of Carthage, in the sight of Matho who was still besieging the town. He returned the Carthaginians' compliment by capturing and crucifying Hamilcar's second-in-command, named Hannibal – not to be confused with Hamilcar's son, who was at that time still a child. But it was the end of the story for the Libyan chief, who was soon taken prisoner in his turn, and his downfall brought in its wake the general submission of the Africans. Even Utica and Bizerta could not hold out for long. As for Matho, a mere native subject who nevertheless had succeeded in making Carthage tremble, he expiated that crime by undergoing through the streets of the town the cruel ordeal of a 'way of the cross', which inspired Flaubert in the last pages of his novel to a picture worthy of inclusion in an anthology of the horrors of the torture chamber.

Carthage had been within an inch of its downfall. But externally too, this war with the mercenaries worked out disastrously. During those three years of difficulties for the Carthaginians, the dominant group in the Roman Senate, who had imposed moderate peace terms in 241 on the outcome of the war in Sicily, had at first eschewed any initiative likely to worsen the situation of the vanquished. Of course, Italian traders had provided the rebels with supplies, and Carthaginian coastguards had caught several hundred of them. But Rome had subsequently recognized those wrongs, exchanged for the captured *negotiatores* the last Carthaginian prisoners still in captivity since the end of the Sicilian war, and authorized its merchants to export to Carthage's benefit while



maintaining the blockade as far as the mercenaries were concerned. To the inhabitants of Utica, who had offered to hand over their town, Rome had replied with a refusal. Lastly, they had not followed up the proposals of the mercenaries of Sardinia, who had also revolted and invited the Romans to come and take possession of the island (Polybius, I, 83). Such moderation is astounding. Our sources explain it by Rome's concern to conform to treaty obligations, in particular that of 241, signed by C. Lutatius Catulus. One suspects also that another concern – for promoting economic imperialism beside a political and military imperialism that was still nascent – may account for such apparent leniency.

But Rome was keeping an ear turned to Carthage's internal politics. The dwindling influence of the Elders (among whom there existed a moderating element, such as Hanno, who were more interested in African development than in overseas ventures) in favour of a more direct democracy that benefited a leader feared by the Romans, like Hamilcar Barca, could not do other than worry Rome. That could explain the surprising volte-face in its attitude regarding Sardinia, in 238/237, at the end of the mercenaries' war. Some of those who had been based there, driven out by the hostility of the Sardinian tribes, had taken refuge in Italy. When they proposed to the Senate that the island, left so to speak in escheat, should be seized, this time their appeal was heard. Rome's interference was a real violation of the treaty of 241, which left Sardinia separate from the peace conditions. Carthage prepared to react by making ready an expedition that must have gathered together the army which Hamilcar would soon lead into Spain. The Roman Senate at once 'voted for war', which authorized its ambassadors to declare it if the Carthaginians did not yield. But Carthage, worn out by years of struggle, gave in. It had to renounce its claim to Sardinia and agree, moreover, to pay the Romans an additional indemnity of 1200 talents. Appointed to take possession of Sardinia in Rome's name, the consul T. Sempronius Gracchus also seized Corsica.



## CARTHAGE'S HARBOURS

A good many cities in the ancient world lived by and for the sea – Tyre, Corinth, Massalia (Marseilles), Ampurias and others may be cited. Carthage belongs eminently to their number. Its prosperity and power, at least until the fourth century BC, long rested almost exclusively on its capacity for mastery of maritime communications, a fact which presupposes – and the reality is unchallengeable, as we saw earlier – the maintenance of a large trading fleet and

naval forces, and therefore harbours to shelter them. Now, the question of Carthage's ports ranks precisely among the most irritating problems that can face the archaeologist or historian. Let me sum it up straight away in a few words: for the first five centuries of the city's history the location of the ports is unknown, as is *a fortiori* their configuration. For the period in which something appears to be known of their organization – and this knowledge is fairly new – this is very late, since recent work on the islet of the circular lagoon does not allow us to go further back in time than the beginning of the second century BC as regards the military port. In other words, our only tangible reality relates to a mere half-century of the city's history out of a total of over six centuries.

Of course it must at once be added that nothing on an ancient site can disguise itself as successfully as a port. In archaic times, and in many instances for a fairly long while afterwards, boats were hauled up on dry land amid port installations whose specific details are not easy to detect or which were profoundly disturbed at some later stage. Ports constructed in the Classical, then Hellenistic and Roman eras were frequently buried under alluvial deposits, concealed – to a point at which they totally disappeared – by changes in the shoreline and its environs, even in sites not occupied after the end of Antiquity. With even greater cause, they are still more difficult to discern in those places where urban development never ceased. It needed the Bourse excavations at Marseilles, some twenty years ago, to reveal at long last the topography of ancient Massilia's harbour basins, at least in part.

But, the objection will be raised, at Carthage everyone can see these ports; there they are, in the shape of two lagoons, a picture that has hardly changed from the Greek historian Appian's celebrated description, taken from a vanished writing of Polybius – the eyewitness of the siege of 148–146 – which must be presented to the reader:

The harbours were connected to each other, and access from the open sea was obtained through a channel 70 feet wide, that could be closed by iron chains. The first basin gave shelter to trading vessels and contained all kinds of ships' tackle. In the middle of the interior basin lay an islet and this, as well as the basin, was partitioned by large jetties. These jetties were occupied by berths made for 220 ships, and by stores connected with the berths, for fitting out triremes. Two Ionic columns rose in front of each berth, giving the periphery of the



basin and the islet the appearance of a portico. On the islet stood a pavilion for the fleet commander, from which the trumpeter would give signals, the herald orders, and the fleet commander himself could keep an eye on everything . . . The docks were not fully visible at first approach, even for merchant ships entering, as they were enclosed by a double wall, and there were gates which allowed traders to pass from the first harbour into the town without traversing the docks (*Libyca*, 96).

At first sight, the text seems completely to match the landscape which, even these days, bare and perfectly legible, seems to have bridged time to illustrate it, minus the walls and ships (figure 94). All the more so since the reader of Appian's account of the final stages of the siege in spring 146 comes across details confirming that description, in the changing view of the advance of Scipio Aemilianus' troops. Having established a bridgehead (several months earlier) on the *choma* (we shall see that this was an artificial platform reclaimed from the sea of an outer harbour for which the big north-south jetty served as a pierhead at the entrance to the interior basins), they burned the docks that lay behind the east quay of the merchant harbour along the *choma* and, taking advantage of



FIGURE 94 The two lagoons at the end of the nineteenth century (ND Photograph).

this diversion, took by surprise not the merchant harbour but the military one, which was linked to it but separated from it by a double wall (Appian, *Libyca*, 127). Thence the Roman soldiers would gain a foothold on the nearby agora, where they would camp for one night before launching the final assault on Byrsa.

Here we find a good example, however, of the difficulty sometimes encountered at certain stages of research in the field, in matching textual and archaeological sources. Before the discovery of the tophet in 1921, the only known vestiges of the very earliest Carthage were the cemeteries, disposed in an arc from south-west to east, from the hill of Byrsa to the slopes of Bordj-Djedid, to the boundaries of the present park of the Antonine Baths. And the city corresponding with these cemeteries, which was assumed reasonably, though not yet known, to be sited between them and the shoreline, seemed far too distant (over a kilometre) from the lagoons for the latter to be easily envisaged as the ancient harbours, even with Appian as guide. At that time, one of the most careful (and most intuitive) observers on the site of Carthage, Dr Carton, had the idea of locating the port of archaic times in the concavity that he had already guessed lay at the site of the Antonine Baths, which we now know to have been built on land subsequently reclaimed from the sea (Carton, 1911, pp. 230–4). We shall see that this hypothesis still merits consideration. Sixty years later, another



FIGURE 95 The circular lagoon (military port). The arrows indicate the site of the British excavations (1974–9) (Combiér, Mâcon).



expert on the site, P. Cintas, was still refusing to accept the identification of the lagoons with the ancient ports. In a statement published with some ado at the commencement of the first operations in the international campaign sponsored by UNESCO, he emphasized the reasons for his scepticism. He chiefly drew attention to the existence, revealed by former excavations in the immediate vicinity of the lagoons, of installations that had been active in certain periods of the Punic city (notably potters' kilns), and were apparently hardly in keeping with a harbour environment (Cintas, 1976, p. 206). The British (figure 95) and American excavations, which were then beginning on the islet of the circular lagoon and on the west border of the other one, would soon prove him both wrong and right.

#### THE CIRCULAR OR MILITARY HARBOUR

The investigations of the British archaeologists in fact resulted in the certain recognition, on the islet of the circular lagoon on one hand, of quays around its perimeter, their lowest foundations dating probably to the late Punic era (figure 96), and on the other, a series of graving docks and winter berthing, in the form of ramps, of which a few remains were identified with great difficulty. By projecting some of the measurements that are certain, the vestiges



FIGURE 96 The remains of the quays of the circular island (British archaeological mission).

discovered allow us to reconstruct the layout, with the greatest probability, of an ensemble of thirty docks, arranged symmetrically and slightly fan-shaped, on either side of an axis formed by a central open area of an elongated hexagonal shape, on the short south side of which would have stood a watch tower: in this may be recognized the fleet commander's building mentioned in Appian's work. On the packed earth floor of these ramps, inclined at about one in ten, wooden cross-pieces were arranged transversely and kept in place by a masonry construction, thus forming a slipway, of which carbonized remains were found. Excavation of one of these ramps obtained indications of their chronology, in the form of broken pieces of amphorae (an Italian Dressel 1a and an African Dressel 18) which would provide a *terminus post quem* of even later dating than the fragments of Campanian A pottery also found in this context (Hurst, 1979, pp. 27-8). If these potsherds do not date a later rebuilding of this ramp, but its original state, it means that the second century BC was already fairly well advanced when these port installations were put into service (figure 97).

Only thirty docks could have occupied the space on the islet, with lengths somewhere between thirty and fifty metres, which makes it possible for at least thirty ships to have been berthed there, depending on their size. To this number must be added berths arranged in

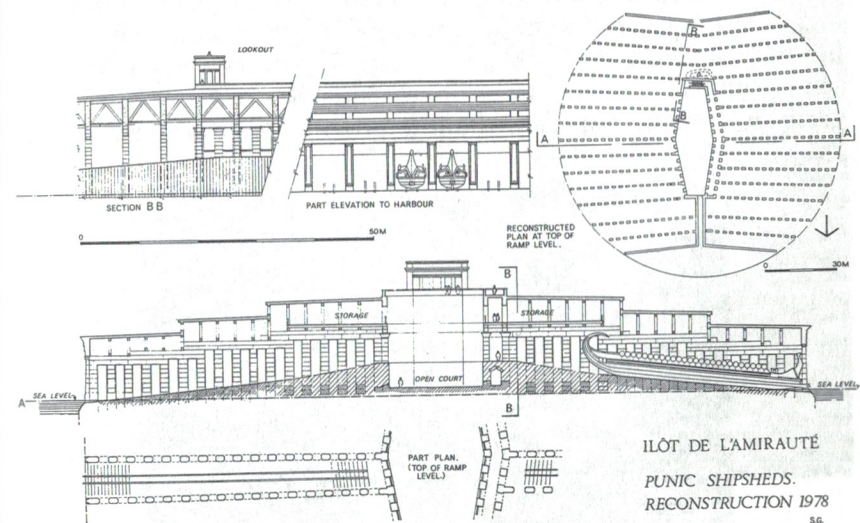


FIGURE 97 A graphic reconstruction of the installations on the circular island, as it was at the beginning of the second century BC (British archaeological mission).



a radiating pattern on the perimeter of the circular port. A limited excavation on the north bank allowed five of these ramps to be discovered, of a length of forty metres, and an extrapolation based on the average width of the ramps reveals that over the whole of the perimeter there must have been 135 or 140 docks. That is, together with those of the islet, a total of 165 or 170 docks, able to house somewhere between 170 and 180 vessels, or in other words, a fleet whose number of units approaches the figure of 220 indicated by Appian as representing the berthing capacity of the military port.

#### THE MERCHANT HARBOUR AND OUTER HARBOUR

Going by the same author, it is known that the two harbours were connected by a channel not brought to light by recent excavations, but there is no doubt as to its location. An American mission retrieved a portion of the merchant harbour's west quay (figure 98). The stratigraphy relating to the lowest courses of this quay justifies the dating of its original elements to the second half of the third century BC (Stager, 1978, pp. 27–30). An extension of the excavations along this quay northwards permitted the discovery of its north-west corner – not a right angle, as might have been expected, but a very wide angle, identified as a later reworking. This reworking, which turned an initial rectangular shape into one that is hexagonal, would be datable to the second century AD, and perhaps attributable to the alterations linked with the creation of the great grain-carrying fleet specially built to provide Rome with fresh food



FIGURE 98 The western quay walls of the rectangular basin of the commercial harbour (American archaeological mission).

supplies, the *Classis Commodiana*. What is certain is that, despite being silted up on successive occasions, the present-day lagoon still recalls that elongated hexagonal shape.

From this originally rectangular basin the outside was reached by way of an access channel, the existence of which in its last outline, Roman or Byzantine, was recently still marked by a small, oblique, egg-shaped lagoon now filled in (point 2 on figure 99). Did the course of this channel vary between the last Punic era and later times? Certainly very little, but the impossibility of examining this area, which is still a military zone as it was in the time of the protectorate, does not allow us to be absolutely precise about it. In fact, the problem is to discover what linked this passage with the outer harbour, still revealed in material form by the shallowly submerged structures of what has always been called 'the quadrilateral of Falbe' since the first prospection carried out at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Danish scholar; we also need to



FIGURE 99 Carthage's outer harbour: 1 commercial harbour; 2 access channel; 3 half-submerged platform of Falbe's quadrilateral. The arrow indicates the probable access to the interior harbour basins (after J. Baradez, 1959).



know the nature, function and chronology of this quadrilateral. On the latter point, a Punic dating for these structures is suggested at least for their northern part by the fact that on this side the pier going more or less at right angles to the shoreline seems to meet it at the point where, as we shall see later, there is good reason to suppose that the sea defence wall of the second century BC lay. Falbe had already observed that the structures of the imperial Roman epoch, situated in front of the late Punic coastline and now submerged – these are the substructures of what Saumagne (1960, p. 157) had called the 'lungomare' of Roman Carthage – run up against this north mole of the quadrilateral and are therefore of a later date. Such dating to the Punic era must also be allowed for the other structures that go to make up the quadrilateral, which forms a coherent whole.

Recently this ensemble was the subject of careful examination by a British team. Although unable to obtain a stratigraphy, obviously nonexistent in a marine environment, a certain number of observations on construction materials and techniques, as well as traces of the removal of blocks in the central part of the quadrilateral, led the authors of this 'offshore survey' to suggest that the quadrilateral in its entirety had very probably been a platform (Yorke and Little, 1975, pp. 94–8). This could in fact be questioned. Thus Colonel Baradez, in whose view the two interior harbours formed the military port – which necessarily presupposed an external stretch of water for the trading port – wanted to regard the quadrilateral both as a harbour basin (though of very slight capacity, as people objected) and as the *choma*, restricted in his hypothesis to a very meagre surface area (Baradez, 1959, pp. 59–60). Certainly too meagre to leave enough space for the developments and fortifications (built by both sides at the time of the final stages of the siege of the town in 147–146) spoken of by Appian (*Libyca*, 123–124) in texts that find their full significance if the irregular trapezium of the quadrilateral is seen as a vast platform for manoeuvres, unloading and storage, with its southern tip acting as a pierhead and effectively affording wind protection to the access passage to the interior harbours (figure 100). As for the passage itself, its seaward extremity, protected by the pierhead, followed a curving line partly re-established by its south quay. A large segment of this quay was found in earlier days: this is the 'Mur Pistor' (point 6 on figure 100), and the flying buttresses of its concave side must have acted as supports to the end of the rampart, on the south side.

The picture thus obtained of Carthage's ports in their final phase may be considered satisfying as regards the coherence of the installa-

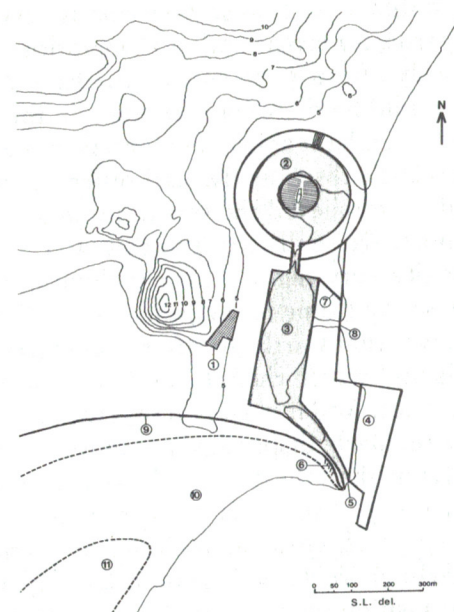


FIGURE 100 Carthage's ports in the first half of the second century BC: 1 the tophet; 2 the military harbour; 3 the commercial harbour; 4 'Falbe's quadrilateral', platform; 5 access passage; 6 'Mur Pistor'; 7 wall separating the two harbour basins; 8 second-century sea defence wall; 9 southern city wall; 10 access channel to the lake of Tunis; 11 extremity of the littoral band (taenia) (S. Lancel).

tions and their appropriateness to requirements. Of course, the stretches of water in these basins are fairly cramped: with a depth of about 2 metres, the circular port offers slightly more than 6 hectares of usable surface, and the rectangular port 7 hectares, with a depth of about 2.5 metres. There has been no little astonishment at the constraints imposed on warships – which must in any case have been very confined in their navigable channel around the island if, as Appian would have it, they were 220 in number – as they would have had to make their way through the rectangular port cluttered with trading vessels in order to reach the sea, going along the one and only passage. And in fact, when Scipio Aemilianus blocked access to the ports by building a barrier from the *taenia* (coastal spit of sand) in 147, the Carthaginians had no other recourse but to open a breach in the sea wall on a level with the circular harbour in order to break the blockade. But that entirely exceptional circumstance must not be generalized: in normal times,



the docks in the military port must have chiefly served the purpose of shipbuilding yards, for repair and refit operations that would not have simultaneously affected the entire squadron. All or nearly all of the warships would be there together only in the over-wintering period. As regards merchant ships, one forgets that Punic Carthage, like Roman Carthage subsequently, had other harbours at its disposal that would have relieved the strain on the principal harbour, the rectangular port. We shall return to this later.

The main difficulty, very clearly, is chronological. One of the very harsh conditions set by Rome in the peace imposed after the defeat of Zama, in 202, was that Carthage, after being forced to hand over all its war vessels and watch them being burned at sea, must limit its fleet to ten triremes. And it is known that the Roman Senate, still mistrustful, quite regularly dispatched commissioners charged with the task of verifying that the Carthaginians were fulfilling their commitments (below, p. 410). It is hard to imagine that Carthage could have deceived such close surveillance by launching clandestinely into vast harbour works which could scarcely pass unnoticed. On their own, the fashioning of the artificial island and the installation of its monumental setting, as well as that of the circular port's surrounds, assuredly figure among the great achievements of the time in the Mediterranean world. It is true that the dating maintained by the British archaeologists on the basis of pottery collected would tend to place these works in the years shortly preceding the fall of Carthage, in a period when recent excavations show us to what extent the city had recovered its prosperity and how it could have fooled a Roman vigilance that had perhaps relaxed, thus presenting Rome with the *fait accompli* of its naval rearmament. In the middle of the second century there would therefore have been something better than Cato's famous fig to rouse the Roman Senators. It remains to say that this dating, arrived at thanks to a few fragments of amphorae from a stratum which may have been modified, is still shaky, and some uncertainty still hangs over the chronology.

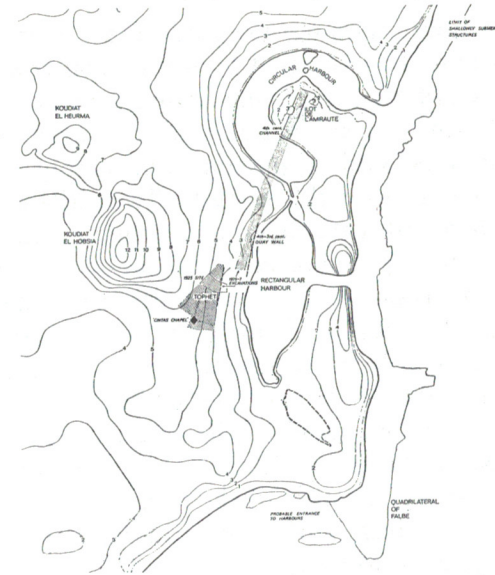


FIGURE 101 The fourth-century channel (British archaeological mission).